



HEWS' Cooper, CASH's Adimey share Coach of the Year accolade

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by PATRICK NAGY Sports reporter



Nicola Adimey of Clarence/Amherst/Sweet Home and Eric Cooper of Hamburg/Eden/West Seneca, the 2024-25 All-Bee Girls Hockey co-Coaches of the Year, led their respective teams to solid seasons. CASH only had 13 skaters and two goalies and finished with seven wins, while HEWS reached the Section VI final. Photo by Joe Eberle

Eric Cooper of Hamburg/Eden/West Seneca and Nicola Adimey of Clarence/Amherst/Sweet Home have coached against each other for years in travel hockey and in the Western New York Girls Varsity Ice Hockey Federation, including this year's Section VI quarterfinals that HEWS won 1-0.

Cooper, who has been coach since 2021, guided HEWS to an 10-6-3 record and an appearance in the Section VI final. Adimey's CASH team, with only 15 players, finished the season with a 7-6-3-1 record.

The voters in the Bee's coverage area thought both did a great job as both received the same number of votes to share the 2024-25 All-Bee Girls Hockey Coach of the Year accolade.

"I was very surprised," Cooper said. "I think there were several other individuals that it would have been very deserving, but I think our playoff run had something to do with it and I owe that all to the young ladies I have on my team."

"I tell the other coaches it's funny to me that you would think my coaching stood out this year," said Adimey, who was an assistant on the 2012-13 team and head coach since the 2013-14 season. "When you have the talent on the team, the coaching is the easiest. I have been doing this so long that when I look back, the times where I have been proud of myself was when we were losing and I was still able to keep the players motivated and positive. Those were the hard years and you have to step up your coaching. But it's very nice to get recognized."

HEWS' playoff run is the most successful in Cooper's tenure, which included a huge 5-2 upset in the section semifinals over No. 1 seed Kenmore/Grand Island/Lockport on Feb. 13 at Buffalo State Sports Arena before losing to Frontier/Franklinville/Lake Shore/Orchard Park, 4-1 in the section final on Feb. 17 at Buffalo State.

"It was a nice run for the kids," Cooper said. "It was the farthest we have gone since the merger of West Seneca and Hamburg. Eden was a later merger. I give the kids all the credit. We have a very good goalie [Ella Buczynski] and we relied on her a lot, and had an excellent defensive core, so we figured if we could limit the other team's opportunities, our goalie could save us when we gave up big opportunities. Plus, we had some kids who could score goals. I think we entered every game thinking that it was our game and we would be victorious at the end."

Cooper was very confident going into the KenGI-Port game that his team would be able to play with them, but admitted he had a little bit of butterflies due to KenGI-Port's potent scoring. HEWS stayed one goal ahead throughout the game.

"KenGI-Port had a lot of 10th, 11th and 12th graders," Cooper said. "I have some players at that age, but a lot of my team is younger. I played a bunch of eighth graders this year, so when you look at it from that perspective, my message to the team was, 'we're not done yet here and have to make sure that we're playing smart hockey and limiting chances for the other team,' and the girls did a great job with that."

Cooper looks at coaching from more of a teaching perspective where he does not yell a lot, but you can hear his deep voice encouraging his players from the bench.

"My focus is always to teach aspects of the game that are going to make us successful and have them really enjoy the game," Cooper said. "It's making sure we are doing things the right way and effectively working together."

"It's a process though as it's a collection of schools and you're bringing in kids from other districts and different backgrounds," Cooper continued. "I told one of my younger players who is brand new to the team, 'I don't like what you're doing out here and I need you to do this instead because you are not playing your position correctly.' I said, 'Does your other coach ever tell you that?' She said no. I asked, 'What do you do at practice?' and she said, 'not this.'"

Adimey was worried that having a small team of 13 skaters and two goalies would be a detriment, but it actually made it easier due to the talent on it.

"The times we got overrun was more of a conditioning thing in the third period, especially if the other team had three strong lines and kept coming at you," Adimey said.

Adimey saw the potential of a good season. She returned her goalie, junior Ella Celej, and junior defensemen Jenny Wild and her daughter, Maya. They also gained eighth grade defenseman Cecilia Bizub and eighth grade forward Celia Watson, who scored 12 goals.

“It’s really been great,” Adimey said. “It’s fun seeing the development of these players. I am crossing my fingers that they don’t go to a private school or the Junior Sabres.”

Adimey’s coaching philosophy is focusing on the little wins.

“Let’s say I am a winger and the puck comes to me and I can’t get it out of the zone. That’s what I want to work on because if you put all those little things together and you get better at them, then the big things are going to happen,” Adimey said. “Getting players those little wins builds up their confidence and then they feel better and the next thing you know, your winger is able to take out the puck and then you can focus on the next thing.”

A fun fact for Adimey is that it’s her 14th year with the program and she has had a daughter on the team every year. Her oldest daughter, Casey, graduated from Amherst in 2018. Her second oldest, Lily, graduated in 2021. Her youngest daughter, Maya, is a junior at Amherst.

“I don’t know if they’ve always enjoyed it,” Adimey said. “It has definitely been great for me to be a part of that with my kids. I think the last time we went to a championship, Casey and Lily were both on the team. It’s a great memory.”

Adimey said she feels lucky that she is still able to be involved with the sport. She still plays two or three times per week through the Buffalo Vibes Draft League out of North Buffalo and at a Performax league at the Northtown Center. She also plays in a women’s summer league at Holiday Twin Rinks.

“I just love how the hockey community has grown and continues to develop and get better every year,” Adimey said. “We have a new wave of talent coming into the Federation. There is also a professional league and those games are fun to watch.”

Adimey keeps up with what is new in the sport through icehockeysystems.com, which always shows new videos of practices and drills. She also watches YouTube videos.

“My assistant coaches pick on me because I’m still so nervous before every game,” Adimey said. “If there is a day when I’m not excited to go to the rink, it’s probably the day I should stop, but so far that hasn’t happened.”